

POLISH CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS

By Stan Leszynski



Christmas ranks first on the list of festivals in Poland, and is second only to Easter as a religious holiday. The celebration lasts from Christmas Eve to January 6th, known as "Three Kings Day."

Preparations for these holidays, a welcome break in the long winter, are begun early. Long before the cooking and baking for the Christmas feast starts, the evenings have been devoted to the making of Christmas tree ornaments. These "ozbody" are traditionally made of colored paper, straw, beads, empty egg shells, gold and silver foil, nuts and fruits.

The tree is usually an evergreen, and may be only a section of the tree or even just a large branch. In some places it is suspended upside down from the beams of the ceiling of the cottage. In any case it is the chief decoration and holds the place of honour.

The actual construction of the ornaments is an interesting but almost lost folk art and one which some Polish groups and a few individuals are seeking to preserve. This article is an attempt to give the details on the preparation of a few of these many ornaments.

Jajko z kolcami

Take an egg, and with an ice pick, nail, needle, or other sharp instrument, puncture a small hole in each end of the egg. Blow out the contents of the egg leaving just a shell. Cut from colored paper approximately 40 quarter circles one and a half inches in length. Roll each quarter circle up and glue the straight edges together to form cones. After the glue cones have dried, notch each one around the bottom or open edge with scissors and bend the notches outward. This notched, cut portion is then glued onto the edge until the egg is completely covered with the cones as in Fig. 1 which shows the completed decoration.

Wisiołek

From colored paper, cut two eight-pointed stars about 4½ inches in width. Also cut from colored paper two one-inch squares, and two smaller squares. The stars may be red, the squares orange and green, or the stars may be purple and the squares green and orange. Glue the two squares to each star as shown in Fig. 2.

From silver or gold foil, cut thirteen circular disks the edges may be notched one and a half inches in diameter. Cut sixteenth lengths of straw (drinking straws may be substituted) each approximately one inch in length. Cut three quarter-circles from foil paper and glue into cone shapes as described for the previous ornament (Jajko z kolcami). Glue into the bottom of each cone some green fringe cut from tissue or crepe paper.

After the cones are dried, take a needle and thread or string, and insert in the top of the cone, through a length



Christmas Around The World. A lovely Japanese "girl-San" preparing holiday dishes as a Lithuanian (L to R), French, Mexican, a cute little Polish Panenka, are on hand to observe. (Foto Chicago Museum of Science and Industry.)

of straw, through the center of a disk, through another straw, through another disk, etc., until there are five straws and four disks on one string. Prepare another strand in a similar manner, and a third one which will have six straws and five disks attached.

Place the ends of the string from the three completed strands on the points of the star putting the longest strand in the center as shown in Fig. 2. Glue the two stars together firmly, making sure you have added a loop of string at the top point of the star so the ornament may be hung on the tree.

Werbienka

Make some small balls from bread or buy some cork balls. Cut from colored foil paper a quantity of disks or stars. From heavier paper cut small circles about the size of a pencil. Also cut a number of straws which are shorter than a pin in length. Take a pin, insert it in the small circle, then through the center of a foil disk, through the length of the straw, through another disk, and insert the pin into the ball of cork or bread. The ball should be completely covered with these disk and straw attachments as shown in Fig. 3.

The ornaments described along with many others, carrots, sleds, radishes, clowns, angels, chains, spiders, cubes, were popularly used in Poland until before World War II. This Christmas, our club, The Polonia Dancers, is preparing a typical Polish Christmas tree of traditional, hand-made ornaments. The tree will be on display, along with those of other nations, during December at the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle.

THE DANCE SITUATION, 1954

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There is still a marked difference between East and West Coasts. The line of demarcation runs as unevenly as the Continental Divide with islands of spheres of influence within the opposite borders. Folk and square dancing as a mass movement is still prevalent on the West coast, but saner dancing is still done on the East coast.

The square dancers on the West coast are beset by the round fad while within the folk dance ranks, another form of round dance, on the shakier side, is creeping in. One is called American Rounds, the other, Latin American folk dances. Of the two the latter is the truer to the name. But in the United States, the Latin dance, like jive and jazz, (in spite of its folk origin) is associated with the night clubs, cabarets, dance halls, juke boxes, teenagers, tin pan alley and beer joints. Would jazz and Latin dances not dominate those places, and to our particularly American frame of mind, if it would not remind us of sensuality and suggestiveness, then, along with all other forms, this too, should be incorporated among the folk dancers in their repertoire. However, there seems to be a definite line of separation. The above type of dance is the property of the dance hall and such, and is easily accessible. I would venture that there are at least 5,000 ballroom dancers to one folk dancer. While it is nice to know any form of dance in existence (including the hula and shim-mey) we must not forget that we are basically folk dancers with a different purpose in mind. We can get jazz 26 hours of the day anywhere and everywhere, including the radio and television. Jazz, Jive, jitterbug and its associated dances are anti-social. Any type of dance of the couple nature where people spend a whole evening around each other's necks mixing with no one else and sometimes not seeing even your own partner (since much of that dancing is done cheek to cheek and looking elsewhere in oblivion) is not a social dance form. And I do not agree with those who wish to encourage more and more jazz and jive among folk dancers. These forms hardly need encouraging, it is done much too much and it is doing the same damage among folk dancers as round dancing is doing in the square dance field. Jitterbug and Jazz has done great damage to European folk cultures. Within the cities and dance halls and at the festivals, the native forms have been actually pushed out (See Clarice Will's article, 2nd paragraph).

Again, I say, yes, we should know every form of dance, and at the more important festivals there should be a representation of all forms of free dances; a free patternless waltz, polka, schottische, csardas, tango, rumba, mambo, samba, calypso, etc., etc. And such is the case in many places East of the Rockies. On the West coast most folk dancers are sequence-tied. Each record played must have a sequence or they are lost. I once put on a Lithuanian Tango, Nutik Sirdie (Calm Down, My Heart), in hopes that a totally strange melody will make them do strange things, and by golly, it did! But not the type of strange thing I expected. They all, as one, did La Chulita Tango! Since they had no polka sequence they sat out. If all of those who learn sequence dances could use them as a source out of which to pick figures, would be fine. But what does really happen? Many of the dancers suddenly discover that they know how to "social" dance. They now become too good to mix with "peasants" and that's the end of their folk dancing.

This is not quite true in the North East. The folk dancing all around is on a much saner basis. They come to the

folk dance places for one purpose only . . . folk dancing. They also frequent ballrooms for one purpose only . . . ballroom dancing. They are much more conscious of native style and authenticity and not overlooking the good-time angle.

The square dancing is the same way. There is great variety. They don't have to rely on round dances. They dance the contra with an animated dignity and pleasure such as is unknown West of the Appalachians. They also do the very interesting Applachina forms, Kentucky running sets and even to do a singing circle is not below their dignity. On a whole on the East coast the movement lost no ground. There they only suffer of a clash of personalities and much un-needed ill feeling between leaders. Michael Herman should be highly commended for one fine deed . . . the institution of "Family Days", a day set aside when all members of the family, regardless of age, can enjoy in a specially arranged program. Thus the youngsters get an early start at folk dancing and within their own family circle, and so tending to strengthen family ties, rather than estranging them. I've seen many children (under ten) who attended these family gatherings and it was a joy to watch them dance with adults as adults.

The round dance is losing in popularity in many Eastern and Central and Northern areas. Originality is gone. Much of the new creations are rehashes (and even the originals had nothing noteworthy to offer). Many of the leaders feel they can't keep up neither with the learning of all the junk that crops up each day, nor with the enormous cost of records whose popularity lasts but a matter of weeks. They display boxes full of records barely used which were already out of fashion.

Folk dancing made little inroad in the square dance circles. There is still a "mind poisoning" against folk dancing, usually by the leaders. In many clubs where enlightened square dance callers lead, folk dancers are introduced either under fake names or disguised as a round dance. The dancers, who always enjoy a novelty (as long as they don't know it is a folk dance), enjoy these masked dances. In many cases this continues undetected, but among more honest leaders they reveal to the group that the dance which they enjoy was a (hugh . . .) folk dance!

Such occasions are rare. On a whole square dance leaders have a phobia for folk dances and have made up their mind that square dancers "will be against folk dancing, will walk off the floor upon mentioning this dreadful word, or that folk dancing is for foreigners only." The fact is that most square dance leaders themselves don't know any folk dances, or, as far as that goes, they don't even know how to square dance. They stand behind the mike yelling and acting important and never dancing with the people, and some of them don't even know how to demonstrate. Very few, indeed, are well-rounded and good dancing square dance callers. Most of them look clumsy. They would look a sorry sight folk dancing, and it is no wonder that they are against folk dancing. But the sad part is that they inject the same dislike among the members of groups they lead.

California is still very much alive with interest and is the folk dance center of the world. There may have been slight loss in some areas, but there was a gain in others. The round dance has lost some of its glamor there, too. Oregon and Washington have definitely made a good gain toward the folk dance and interest is alive. On a whole, the folk and the square, this year, seem to be on the upgrade in most parts of the country.

THE ETHNIC SITUATION

A great change has taken of late among many ethnic groups, due to two factors: D.P.'s and Audience Consciousness.